

Personal to Mr. Gimblett

Mr. Gimblett, the ex-detective, was seated one morning in his dingy little office over the furniture shop on the Waterloo Bridge road, when the clerk brought in word that “a young person” wanted to see him.

“Who is she?” inquired Mr. Gimblett.

“She says she will tell you her name herself. She has never been here before,” said the clerk.

“Begging?” suggested Mr. Gimblett.

“I think not. She doesn’t look that sort, and her manner is overbearing,” was the reply.

“A young person, did you say?” remarked Mr. Gimblett.

“Yes, sir; and not bad looking neither,” said the clerk, who perhaps knew his chief’s little weakness.

“I suppose you had better show her in,” remarked Mr. Gimblett, with an air of supreme indifference. Nevertheless, when the clerk’s back was turned, he ran his fingers through his hair, settled his cravat, and deftly rearranged the flowers in his button-hole.

The “young person” did not belie the clerk’s description—at least in Mr. Gimblett’s humble opinion. She was young, tall, had a good figure, and a pretty face. But what chiefly impressed Mr. Gimblett was the keen and penetrating glance of her dark eyes and the firmness of her mouth and chin. He instinctively guessed that he had before him a girl of unusual shrewdness and energy of character, while her calm self-possession testified to the strength of her nerves. She was very quietly yet becomingly dressed, and there was no attempt to disguise her station in life, which was evidently that of a superior sort of domestic servant.

“Pray be seated,” said Mr. Gimblett, as she entered.

“You are Mr. Gimblett, I suppose,” said the visitor, taking possession of a chair, and drawing it up to the table. “My name is Martha Chale. My father used to be in the force with you.”

“Oh, yes; I recollect,” said Mr. Gimblett, slightly disappointed at the prelude, though he scarcely knew why. “I knew your father very well. He was killed in that affair over Belham way. Very sad! very sad!”

“I didn’t come to talk about my father,” continued Martha Chale, in a cool, matter-of-fact tone. “He has been dead ten years and more. I mentioned him as a sort of introduction.”

“I understand,” said Mr. Gimblett, surprised and amused by his visitor’s tone and manner.

“I want to engage your services in a business way, and I’m quite ready to pay you,” said Martha, producing an apparently well-filled purse, and placing it upon the table. “I’m not one of your extravagant sort, but I’m not mean neither. I know how to save, but I don’t grudge spending.”

“Excellent!” exclaimed Mr. Gimblett, with involuntary admiration.

“The fact is, I’m being watched by the police, and it’s unpleasant,” said Martha, abruptly.

“Naturally,” acquiesced Mr. Gimblett.

“I’ve lost my situation for nothing, and now my footsteps are dodged night and day. I don’t like it, and mother don’t like it neither, and what is more, I ain’t going to stand it.”

Martha Chale spoke with considerable asperity and vigor, and Mr. Gimblett could not help perceiving that the young woman was blessed with a temper of her own. Yet the ex-detective thought the flash of her eyes and the quick rush of color to her cheeks became her wonderfully, while he rather admired, than otherwise, the decision of her tones.

“Quite right,” he said benignly; “what is it all about?”

“Well, it is this: I’ve been living as upper housemaid for the last two years with Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer, of Park crescent.”

“One moment—Mortimer, Park crescent,” said Mr. Gimblett, as he made a note upon his blotting-pad.

“There has been a robbery there lately; some of Mrs. Mortimer’s jewelry was stolen from a safe.”

“Burglars?” inquired Mr. Gimblett.

“I know nothing about,” said Martha Chale, shrugging her shoulders. “The safe was opened by someone with a key, and the things abstracted. Nobody knows when it was done, except that the things were all right within a few days before the loss was discovered. That is the whole story. I was sent away.”

“And none of the other servants?”

“No. O, I know why I was singled out. Mrs. Mortimer is mortal jealous of her husband, and she must needs take it into her head—”

“Pretty young women are dangerous in a house,” interposed Mr. Gimblett, jocosely.

But from the manner in which this complimentary speech was received, the ex-detective judged that he had better not have uttered it. Martha Chale paused and fixed her dark eyes upon him

with an expression of contemptuous astonishment. For once in his life, Mr. Gimblett felt disconcerted, and became suddenly conscious of the fact that his hair was gray.

“I boxed his ears once for trying to bar the passage on the staircase; I knew that,” said Martha, impressively. “Misses hadn’t no call to be jealous of me.”

Mr. Gimblett did not trust himself to comment upon this remark, and his visitor proceeded:

“I suppose Mrs. Mortimer sent the police onto me. Anyway, I’m watched night and day, and I’ve had enough of it.”

“I don’t see what I can do for you,” said Mr. Gimblett.

“You haven’t heard yet,” said the young woman, catching him up quickly. “Wait till I tell you.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Mr. Gimblett, mildly.

“I don’t wish anybody any harm, but I want to protect myself. That is the reason I come to you instead of communicating what I know to the police.”

“You said you didn’t know anything about the robbery,” said Mr. Gimblett quickly.

“I meant, of course, that I had nothing to do with it myself. But I know who did it,” rejoined Martha sharply.

“Oh! I see. Pardon me.”

Mollified by Mr. Gimblett’s hasty apology, the young woman proceeded to reveal what she knew in terse, matter-of-fact language, which her companion listened to with increasing respect.

“I dare say you are right,” said Mr. Gimblett, when she had concluded her recital. “But it sounds strange. What sort of man is Mr. Mortimer?”

“He is younger than his wife. Married her for money, and gets precious little of it,” was the significant answer.

“If you are right—of course, you are not absolutely sure,” said Mr. Gimblett, quite humbly—“I have no doubt I can manage matters so that you won’t be annoyed any longer.”

“That is what I want. Mind you don’t carry the matter any further,” said Martha, rising from her chair. “If you won’t take any money from me,” she added, “I won’t press it on you, because I daresay you will make him pay your expenses.”

If Mr. Gimblett had required any further proof of his visitor’s shrewdness, the last remark would have furnished it. As he rose to open the door for her he was seized with a sudden nervousness which he had never before experienced. He took her hand in his with the deliberate intention of

giving it a fatherly squeeze indicative of admiration, but upon meeting her gaze he abandoned his subtle design, while a faint tinge of color came to his face. It was not until he had been alone for nearly five minutes that he completely recovered his equanimity, and then he felt unaccountably ashamed of himself.

However, his self-esteem survived the shock, and half an hour later he sallied forth with his usual calm and confident air and manner, to make a few inquiries on his own account about Martha Chale and her story. The latter, as far as regarded the robbery, he found perfectly correct, nor did there seem any reason to doubt that the girl was perfectly innocent of the affair. The police were watching her, it is true, but this was chiefly owing to the instructions of Mrs. Mortimer, and not because they had grounds for suspecting her. As a matter of fact, the jewels had been taken in a manner which left absolutely no clue to the perpetrators of the theft. For his personal satisfaction, Mr. Gimblett ascertained that Martha Chale bore an excellent character, and when out of a situation lived with her mother, a respectable woman, who had brought up a large family by her own exertions.

Fortified by these details, Mr. Gimblett resolved to have an interview with Mr. Mortimer without delay, for his sudden interest in Martha Chale prompted him to lose no time in earning her gratitude. He therefore took an early opportunity to pay Mr. Mortimer a visit at his club, thinking he was more likely to be able to see him alone, a good deal surprised upon the detective's being ushered into the strangers' room at the Blemheim. He received him, however, civilly enough.

"Your card informs me that you are a detective officer," said Mr. Mortimer, who was a florid, overdressed, rather handsome man of 40, with a shifty [look] and a weak chin.

"An ex-detective, sir, to be precise. I thought," added Mr. Gimblett, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, "you would sooner, I called upon you here than at your own house."

"It all depends on what you have come about," said Mr. Mortimer, with an uneasy laugh.

"It's in connection with the alleged robbery of jewels at your house," said Mr. Gimblett, with startling abruptness, looking him straight in the face.

Mr. Mortimer dropped his eyes to the carpet before the detective's gaze, either from sudden nervousness or from constitutional inability to meet a direct glance. He put his hands in his trouser pockets, and, looking at the toes of his boots, nodded.

"The fact is, there is a young person who used to be in your service who seems to be unjustly suspected by the police—or by somebody," said Mr. Gimblett in his most incisive tones. "She is being watched and inconvenienced, though she isn't the guilty party."

"You mean the girl Martha. Martha Chale, I suppose," hastily added Mr. Mortimer. "Well, I don't suspect her. My wife sent her away. I think it was devilish hard lines!"

"So it is. In fact, it's persecution, and must be put a stop to."

“It isn’t my fault,” said Mr. Mortimer, sulkily. “I can’t do anything in the matter.”

“You will have to, sir, or else...”

“Or else what, sir? What the deuce do you mean?” cried Mr. Mortimer, blazing up.

“Well, sir, Miss Chale don’t bear you any malice, but she does happen to recollect your starting off on a journey with a small valise on the evening of the 7th of July,” said Mr. Gimblett, significantly. “It might be desirable to investigate that little trip. You were supposed to have gone to Birmingham on business, but—”

The ex-detective’s remarks were interrupted by Mr. Mortimer suddenly turning round and making a tremendous rattling in the empty grate with the poker, apparently oblivious of the fact that there was no fire. But ere he effected this transparent maneuver Mr. Gimblett had remarked the guilty glow which had suffused his brow.

“It wouldn’t do, of course, for Mrs. Mortimer to suspect,” resumed Mr. Gimblett, quietly, as soon as he could make himself heard again.

“No, no. Come out with it. Let us have no beating around the bush. What is it you want?” inquired Mr. Mortimer, dropping the poker and fidgeting about the mantle shelf.

“Only a letter to the police-inspector, that I can deliver,” said Mr. Gimblett, readily. “Nothing more than that.”

Mr. Mortimer hurriedly seated himself at the nearest table and took up a pen.

“What shall I say?” he inquired.

“Only that you have reason to know that Martha Chale is innocent of the robbery and request that the police will cease to annoy her,” said Mr. Gimblett, glibly.

“Reason to believe—not know,” said Mr. Mortimer, commencing to write.

“*Know*,” repeated Mr. Gimblett, emphatically.

“*Know*,” exclaimed Mr. Mortimer, as he rapidly dashed off the note. “What shall I say, though, to the police, if they ask me what I mean?” he added, looking up.

“They won’t, sir. I’ll manage that,” said Mr. Gimblett.

“And my wife needn’t know anything about this, I suppose?” he continued.

“Which, sir? Oh, you mean the note to the police. No, sir; certainly not,” said Mr. Gimblett.

“Very well. There you are, then,” said Mr. Mortimer, flinging the sheet of paper across the table.

“It’s rather a delicate job, sir; may require a little oiling,” said Mr. Gimblett, coughing behind his hand.

“How much?” demanded Mr. Mortimer, after an uneasy pause.

“Well, perhaps—perhaps a tenner.”

Mr. Mortimer’s only answer was to hand Mr. Gimblett a bank-note rather tremulously, and with this the interview ended. Mr. Gimblett bowed politely and took up his hat, while Mr. Mortimer opened the door to him, looking particularly sheepish and crest-fallen.

Mr. Gimblett chuckled to himself when he got outside, and proceeded in the direction of Scotland yard, having first securely stowed the £10 note. Whether the “oiling” process extended beyond Mr. Gimblett himself is by no means clear. Suffice it to say that five minutes’ chat with the inspector having charge of Mr. Mortimer’s case, the production of the letter, and a few nudges and winks exchanged over a friendly glass, seemed to show how the land lay. From that day forward Martha Chale ceased to be a suspected person, even as a matter of form, and the mystery of the robbery was considered to be solved in a manner not altogether uncommon.

Mr. Gimblett was gallant enough to pay Martha Chale a visit at her mother’s humble abode to report what he had done, and received the young woman’s thanks, which were tendered without the least enthusiasm, rather to his disappointment. The ex-detective evinced an inclination to follow up the acquaintance thus auspiciously commenced, and ventured to call a second time when he happened to be passing soon afterward. But on the latter occasion Martha’s manner was so abrupt and inhospitable that he did not care to repeat the experiment, though he was surprised how very mildly he resented her treatment of him.

Shortly after this Mr. Gimblett had to go over to Paris on business. “Missing persons traced” was one of the announcements upon his professional prospectus, and this branch afforded him plenty of employment. The supposed elopement of a publican’s wife with a sprightly grocer’s assistant was the cause of his visit to the French capital on this occasion, and in the course of his inquiries in connection with this thrilling case he picked up a little piece of information which recalled Martha Chale vividly to his recollection. Perhaps if the truth were known her image suggested itself to his imagination rather frequently, for there is no denying that for the first time in his life Mr. Gimblett found the gayeties of Paris decidedly depressing, and was constantly detecting fancied resemblances between casual passers-by and a certain young woman who had impressed him so much with her cleverness. But the trifling discovery he made in Paris suggested an uncomfortable suspicion as to whether Martha Chale’s cleverness had not been rather too much for him. In other words, he began to have a disquieting idea that the young woman had made a cat’s-paw of him; and, what was worse, he learned to doubt whether she was really as innocent of the disappearance of Mrs. Mortimer’s jewels as she had pretended. Upon his return to England Mr. Gimblett made some inquiries which resulted in his paying Miss Martha another visit in a frame of mind which wavered between furious indignation and bitter disappointment. His perturbation was increased by a strange longing that he might after all have wronged her, and this charitable sentiment came uppermost when he met her face to face.

“Miss Chale,” he said, as soon as he got an opportunity of speaking to her alone, “you remember the story you told me about Mr. Mortimer?”

“Yes; I do,” was her calm reply.

“You declared you had seen in the valise he took away with him the jewels that were supposed to be stolen,” proceeded Mr. Gimblett.

“I know I did; but it wasn’t true,” returned Martha, returning Mr. Gimblett’s look almost defiantly.

“I know it wasn’t true,” retorted the ex-detective, unable to conceal his resentment. “I have discovered the mystery about Mr. Mortimer’s little trip. I have had an interview with the lady.”

“You seem to have taken a good deal of unnecessary trouble,” said Martha tartly. “I could have told you all about his goings on.”

“Well, you made a fool of me anyhow!” exclaimed the inspector, more crestfallen than angry. “You might have gone to Mr. M. yourself; but neither you nor he would have known how to manage the police.”

“That is why I came to you,” said Martha, with a nod.

“Yes; I understand that. It was very clever of you, miss. May I inquire your object?” demanded Mr. Gimblett, with ironical politeness.

“I was so closely watched that I couldn’t aid him to escape,” said Martha, for the first time looking slightly embarrassed.

“Him! Who?” inquired Mr. Gimblett sharply.

“The party that did it. I was keeping company with him, and I was fool enough to—to believe in him. He came into the house once or twice when I was alone, but I don’t know how he managed to take the things. The loss was discovered before he had time to get away, and he went into hiding—being new at it, I suppose!”

“I should think so,” fiercely ejaculated Mr. Gimblett.

“He swore he wouldn’t stir without me, and I began to fear he would do something desperate. I was afraid to go near him while the police were about, and so I come to you.”

“I see. And what became of him?” inquired Mr. Gimblett, his admiration for Martha’s striking abilities for his own line of business overcoming even his resentment and jealousy.

“I packed him off,” said Martha, laconically, “to America.”

“Are you to follow?” asked Mr. Gimblett, with a sudden thumping at his heart.

“Not I. The man is a fool and a coward. I couldn’t marry with either one or the other,” said Martha, in her matter-of-fact way. “Besides I’m honest.”

“I knew you were. I could have sworn it!” exclaimed Mr. Gimblett, in a tone that seemed to disconcert even the imperturbable Martha. “But, I say,” he asked, abruptly, “you never let a cur like that get away with so much swag.”

“No; he’ll be disappointed when he arrives over the water. He thinks he has it all, but it is upstairs,” with a little laugh.

“Bravo!” cried Mr. Gimblett, slapping his knee enthusiastically.

“I was going to ask you to contrive somehow to take the things back to the Mortimers,” said Martha. “I don’t like keeping ‘em in the house any longer.”

“Quite right. Leave everything to me. Do you know, Miss Martha,” said Mr. Gimblett, becoming suddenly confidential, “that there’s a reward offered which would do nicely to furnish a cottage for a newly-married couple.”

“Then it will come in convenient,” said Martha, quietly.

“It will, Martha, if you will only consent,” cried Mr. Gimblett, suddenly seizing her hand. I’m older than you, but we’re suited for one another in every way. We should run well in double harness, my dear, both in business and domestic life.”

“You was saying I’ve made a fool of you once,” remarked Miss Martha, neither elated nor indignant, but simply matter-of-fact; “do you want me to do it again?”

Mr. Gimblett’s only answer was to imprint a kiss on the substantial hand he held between his own. For a moment Martha Chade’s dark eyes flashed furiously, and she looked inclined to box his ears. But she finally didn’t.—*London Truth*

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